ACADEMICA

Selected Portion of Margit's MA Thesis that Addressed the Tuning Scores

(2005)

The thesis' focus was on experiential and embodied research, and the phenomenal state of permeability*, so the term and the view is embedded into the material of this description of tuning.*

Lisa Nelson's "tuning" scores are compositional tools, improvisational practices, and layers of observation altogether. In "tuning," the participants use movement and verbal calls to communicate desires, imagination, and memory. One's many senses interact with the environment and with one another. With the sensorial material, participants collectively compose theater in a mutually determined "image space." Through generating and communally composing movement, the scores investigate elements of live performance and everyday action. They are a vehicle to attune to an individual and collective sense of space, time, and behavior. The tunings scores illuminate how people compose perception *through* action, with theory building and feedback incorporated into their practice.

The scores have been developed over several decades through the creative research of Lisa Nelson, in collaboration with those she has encountered around the world. Her work with individuals and with the group Image Lab (K.J. Holmes, Karen Nelson, Lisa Nelson, and Scott Smith) became a lab for the development of her research.[1] The scores were influenced by many sources, especially James J. Gibson's perceptual research and Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen's early research in BodyMind Centering™. Lisa has mentioned Gregory Bateson's studies, and Steve Paxton's initial inquiry into "'what a body does to survive'"[2] as additional sources for the work. The tuning scores investigate how one survives activity in real time with others, based on one's sensory systems. The practice of tuning explicitly delves into the composing as it relates to perceiving, sensing, and action.

In an article on the inception of her research, Lisa stated, "It is the physical sensations that are the image. The thrill of seeing somebody move, the thrill of seeing sensation manifested in anybody's body is what I think dance is."[3] She further described that there is no image without participation. This idea is fundamental to her scores. One physically *relates* to material. Movement and communication are mutually interactive. Each event is literally a construction of a language and a grammar for communication in that particular setting.

The scores pare down one's understandings of the bases of dance- the length, timing, or texture of a phrase. By deconstructing the elements of composition as they relate to making movement in space, the work shows how people compose their own meaning, in relation to others. This creates a foundation for ways of seeing how one moves. The scores unfold both the material of movement, one's experience of moving and watching, and the structures that enable this kind of layer of observation. These structures are called "scores,' which is a common practice in contemporary improvisational dancing. The term is an influence of music, as in a musical "score."

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[1] In a communication with Karen Nelson, she stated that Lisa's role in Image Lab was not necessarily easy to articulate. While Lisa had a longer-term direction with her own research, the group was a collaborative effort. Karen suggested that Image Lab was "under the visionary guidance" of Lisa as an appropriate way to describe the structure of the group. (Karen Nelson, p.c., 2004).

[2] Nelson, 2004, 20.

[3] Nelson, 1994, 14.

In daily life, people learn to navigate with the animate and inanimate environment of which they are a part.[4] In this way, living is fundamentally dependant on communication. One acts for survival- in part, for one's own understanding, and in part in interaction with others. Lisa Nelson's scores rely on the intricate actions that occur because humans are constantly composing themselves in situations. These "incidental movements" are purposeful, and often overlooked in everyday attention.[5] The movement that occurs, however, is the creative action of survival.

The tuning scores provide tools for observing how people are constantly composing and the context to navigate with the elements that arise in the situation. The scores are a set of dynamic practices that shift and develop through their practice. Each situation elicits a unique experience of the scores. The forms develop and grow as the practitioners encounter the details of the environment and interact with one another. This dynamism in itself is an indication of permeability.

What is considered to be the "tuning scores" is actually a broad range of actions. Many acts can be a kind of tuning score, if they serve to attune to its own dance. Specific structures and internal research processes comprise the basis of the perceptual and practical framework. The sets of actions can be developed as a performance structure, at times with chapters, episodes, and their own internal narratives. A writing practice can be a kind of tuning practice. A writing process also has the potential to codify the diverse and permeable practice of the experiential investigations, so it is useful to state that the scores range from very specific activities to a broad spectrum of dance making. What unifies the scores is the observational lens within the context of an embodied practice.

The tuning scores integrate the rigor of scientific inquiry and the poetry of creative research. By offering a medium for investigation of details, the scores provide many facets of possibility: tools for attending to the details, an arena to observe them, and a way to compose from these intricacies. They offer a medium for composing, and also for descriptions regarding her specific choreographic intentions, the functions of eyes and skin (literally and metaphorically, with penetrating interconnection), radical constructivist philosophy, trends among dancers across the globe, and human behavior, to name some of the material she addressed. In her speaking, the simultaneous intricacy and simplicity illustrated her revolutionary research over decades, evidence to a facile construction of communication.

At one point during a conversation, Lisa mentioned her use of inversion as it occurs in the scores. It seemed like a key to unlock a mystery around the work, particularly as it relates to permeability. The inversions are a way, through attention, that one can see how vulnerable the "self" and "space" as a solid entity is.[6] By describing more in detail about how the scores operate, I will demonstrate how this state relates to this set of practices.

Since the scores are experiential, I begin here with the admission that this is only a single layer of description, from my point of view. When one works with these scores, it becomes apparent how there are many facets to a single event, and the process of observing and what is observed are inextricably linked. In describing tuning scores from a variety of standpoints, I will orient the reader to the work itself. I will use the perceptual research of J.J. Gibson, conversations with Lisa, and my own experience with the scores

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[4] Gibson, 1966, 22.

[5] Nelson, Telephone Interview, 2005.

[6] A parallel apparatus of inversion is used in Tibetan Buddhist perceptual exercises. One intriguing application of these practices was developed by Tarthang Tulku. He presents the traditional exercises in a secular frame, which he calls *Nyingma.* For an example of this, see Tulku, 1977.

to communicate facets of the work. My approach to this chapter will be to show how tuning scores offers a context out of which one can practice permeability.

Inversion

> Am I touching you or you me? …You can invert the point of view. It changes everything. This is also a thrilling thing about the imagination, and semantics depends on the imagination. When you mess around, imagination is ripe and ready to go with it. Instantly in a breath, you're made permeable, made changeable. You can do this with language, and movement.
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> (Lisa Nelson, p.c. 2005)

In a recent interview with Lisa Nelson, I asked her some questions that were emerging for me in writing and in teaching. To be honest, I am continually floored by Lisa's intelligence and the intelligibility of her work. Again, it was made evident on how many levels the tuning scores operate. She wove a network of fundamental aspects of tuning, have served to evoke my felt sense of permeability, through my years of practice with the scores. In the above quote, she mentions the relationship between imagination and semantics. This alludes to the creative role of composing experience that underlies the tuning scores. In the context of tuning, inversion is a kind of poetic device and approach.

In Lisa's description of the underpinnings of tuning scores, she wondered about objects and how they are generally used for culturally defined functions. How is it that individuals learn not to explore objects freely? When given the opportunity, what arises?[7] In improvisation, specifically in tuning scores, one can investigate objects, finding unfamiliar objects through creative research. When one enters into a playing space, it changes the elements of it. In an analogous example, when a person touches an object with a creative attitude, the object has a different function than if it was observed at a distance across the room. Inversion provides an opportunity to shift one's basic senses of space, distance, alongside of measuring it.

The following tuning structure shows the use of inversion:

Score: *First, touch your own arm, organizing yourself to sense the surface of your own skin. Then invert your attention; explore the sensations of your hand as it moves to "read" your arm. Then, reverse the movement, so that your arm moves and your hand is still and organize your attention to both surfaces of the contact.*

Once there is contact, the poles of subject and object lose solidity, since there is a relationship and contact. The connection becomes central to details of a field of exploration.[8]

This tuning score is a direct application of James J. Gibson's seminal book, *The Senses Considered as Perceptual Systems.* Gibson discusses the two poles of experience in his chapter on the "haptic" sense, or sense of touch:

> The fact seems to be that in touching a solid object one can attend either to the external resistant thing or to the impression on the skin. The reader should try it. Within limits, you can concentrate either on the edge of the table,

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[7] This is a provocative statement for tuning scores and embodied cognition in general, when considering Mark Johnson's description of image schemas. He examined how people develop their conceptual thought and basic units of action in relation to the objects that they are confronted with in their environment.

[8] These scores have remarkable similarities with the phenomenological findings of Merleau-Ponty. Unlike this writing, however, in tuning scores, an experience is communicated through practice. This is an essential component of embodied research. For further research, see Merleau-Ponty, 1968.

> say, or on the dent it makes in *you*. It is as if the same stimulating event had two possible poles of experience, one objective and the other subjective.[9]

At the time Gibson wrote the book in 1966, perception and sensation had been considered *representationally*, such that objects are often considered to be "outside" and the brain "registers" them, whereas Gibson put forth an enacted view of perception *as* action.[10] These scores animate Gibson's proposals. The interaction of attention and touch provide a technique for accessing permeability. Through the action, one can enliven, dissolve and bring sensation to one's own surfaces.

In researching touch through tuning scores, the distinctions between skin and environment are not so clear. Skin is radiant, and through heat, we can sense and commune with the world in interaction with us. A surface, which in some ways could be considered an edge, is also a kind of entryway. Through touch, our skin, which is considered the boundary between our selves and the world, makes contact, and is *in interaction*. Skin, Lisa declared, is a "big imagination blob."[11] Skin is mainly comprised of pores (space) and water. These are points of view that support the potentiality of permeability.

An inversion score*: Right now, I can organize myself to feel this* keyboard *through the surface of my fingers, and with a shift of attention, I can use the same contact and feel the surface of my* fingers*, through the keyboard. As a reader, you can read these words, moving your eyes across the surface, composing an understanding of this very word, and you can also read, organizing to feel your eyes roll in the sockets, and shift between the possibilities of this pole of action. If you close your eyes, and read, what would you experience?*

Once a person has worked with inversion, the process is a potential technology. In the following example, I had an experience in which inverting was directly linked to a state of permeability. During the summer of 2000 in Seattle, Sheri Cohen and I invited the improvisational movement community to participate in tuning scores, outdoors, in a variety of public locations. On one particular afternoon, a group of us were tuning in a park by Elliot Bay. The facilitation had an expansive quality to it, and we found ourselves in a group dance, spilling around the park, communicating through sparse calls and movement exploration.[12] At one point, I was been dancing near a signpost, immersed in Angelina Baldoz' trumpet playing, facing the water and the setting sun. I remember that I could neither differentiate between the pole, the music, and my body, nor the series of events that led me there. It felt like a kind of communion. This is a kind of permeability- I was engaged with my environment, experiencing gentleness in my bodily feel.

The Appendix (at end) shows how the use of calls served to invoke a particular bodily state in me. Calls are the words that people utter to suggest shifts among the participants, such as "hold," "replace," or "end." The calls both change the events and

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[9] Gibson, 1966, 99.

[10] N.B., Current perceptual research, such as Alain Berthoz' *The Brain's Sense of Movement,* or Alva Noe's perceptual philosophy equally addresses the lines of thinking expressed in Gibson's writings. Despite the history of research, the notion of perception occurring *through* action is still a revolutionary idea. Berthoz states that while perception has often been defined as an "interpretation of sensory message," (an image outside is represented inside the visual cortex), it is actually a process of "simulation of action," "judgement," and "decision making." (Berthoz, 2000, 9). These findings similarly dispel the fixed distinctions of in and out.

[11] Nelson, p.c., 2005

[12] The particular facilitator for this day was John Dixon. I consider the influence of his approach in sharing the material, and the place where we were located as major elements for my experience of the event. In Seattle, we kept a running commentary that we shared via emails, called a tuning log. I wrote a log after this event, included as Appendix 2.

keep the participants actively engaged, even when observing. They are used sparingly so that one can have the time to translate them into action. In this instance of tuning, the "hold" call supported my experience of permeability.

In this run, my act of approaching the sign was interrupted by a call. In the experience of this "hold," in which I became still and engaged with my current experience and the environment, I became connected with the sign. This inversion of identity with the pole went a step further with the call "replace." It enabled me to imagine I was embodying the sign itself, taking into my body the experience of what I imagined the sign was. "Replace," in this case, enacted permeability. Through an example such as this, one aspect that emerges is the effect of the calls on the composition of playing space, and the experience of those in it. They offer a point of departure for creative exploration of a current experience of an object, situation, or image.

Multisensoriality

Permeability comes from an attunement to the sensory experience beyond vision, a predominant system. In daily life, we take in so much information with our eyes. In practicing tuning scores, one has a context to deeply explore the interaction of sensing. Gibson made a distinction with sensing, differentiating between *having a sensation* and *detecting*, the latter implying the multiple modes of action that collaborate in interaction with environment.[13] By considering the senses as perceptual systems, the author is showing the interactive nature as the basis for his research. In this conversation between all of the bodily systems goes beyond the five commonly recognized senses.[14]

As a person notices how fundamentally all the senses interact, s/he can attune to the basis of movement in any action. Through deconstructing in tuning scores, one attempts to isolate the individual senses. Through practice, it becomes evident how interlinked they actually are. These interactions show the permeability of the senses themselves. Through the constraints of tuning scores, one can learn to navigate one's use of senses, as well as one's use of attention and intention. If one looks at action through one's experience of sensing and perceiving, a world of intricacy opens up.

One tuning score uses the participatory action of "blind learning," provides a medium for the interaction of senses. It developed out of Lisa's interest in the physical contact between teacher and student among dancers in Bali.[15]

SCORE: *Two participants individually make movement phrases out of sight from one another. One closes his or her eyes, and the other teaches the blind learner, without speaking. Once the phrase is learned to the teacher's satisfaction, they shake hands to indicate completion. The partners switch.* "Blind learning."

The task elicits unfamiliar ways to communicate and move. When touching, without vision, one has to induce an image from the localized information that one receives, blind, and mobilize unfamiliar sensory feedback. This develops and cultivates a multisensorial imagination.

Each attempt at this is unique. Having taught this score, I have seen a wide variety of timings, speeds, techniques and approaches to teaching and learning. Some people create new languages out of sound or touching techniques. Others cannot *not* talk. Some people move their partner and guide them to specific parts of the action,

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[13] Gibson, 1966, 1.

[14] For a great description of the interaction of the senses, see Nelson, 1978; Cytowick, 1993; Cohen, 1993; and Gibson's various writings.

[15] Nelson, Lisa, p.c. 2001.

whereas other teachers let the learner guide his or her own touch. The actual movement phrase, in this context, has an equal importance with the learning process. The movement phrase is the material around which all the action occurs, and simultaneously, to watch this is to see a meaningful dance of unusual movement. As is true with many of the tuning scores, they offer a context to observe human behavior.

In many of the tuning scores, eyes closed movement is embedded into the structure. New sensory feedback emerges when the predominant one is removed. How, then, does a person read the space and function? It calls on the engagement and collaboration of the myriad senses. Closing the eyes attunes a person to a non-habitual set of stimuli. One main sensory feedback becomes touch, and all of its components. From the scores that I have mentioned so far, the world of imagination and attention that comes with the sense of touch is a primary element in tuning, and is interlinked with eyes-closed movement.

In a description of multisensoriality, we come closer to a definition of what an image is, in accordance with tuning scores. An image is a multisensorial unit. Unlike common conceptions of an image, which lean more toward a visual representation, here, the image encompasses one's whole experience of an action and a palette of perceptual possibility.[16] Permeability, then, has the quality of an image, and in this practice, an image permeates through the normal boundaries of daily physical categories.

Interaction

Tuning is a collaborative, collective research. The scores are interactive, with feedback built into the practice, through the collaborative composition. Through tuning into the experience of the action, one begins to understand the particular ways that each person operates, and these properties become known quantities in the compositional rubric. They offer tools for exploring the elements of performance and specific ways in which to enter in. The scores simultaneously deconstruct the elements while generating movement material. This aspect clarifies what it means to compose through participation. In the process of constructing a common language, the scores demonstrate that each person has a unique point of view. This kind of participation is central to a permeable process and state.

There is a recurring shift between what is "in" and what is "out" that redefines itself through the relationship between perception and action. A major apparatus for this oscillation is the participatory element of tuning. As each new entrance begins, the space is redefined.

This shifting sense of space is well exemplified in the use of calls. When viewers make calls, they are actively engaging. They have a direct compositional influence and interact through the medium of the action in the constructed space. Calls accumulate, as do the actions, developing a communal language. This is an interactive process. A new call is uttered, and then collectively and individually translated. All those present necessarily translate the call, including the viewers in their own way. The calls show some aspect of the desires of the people who are participating in the tuning experience. It is interesting to note what incites a person to speak. Though interpretations are just that – interpretations- the interactions are clear examples if individual behavior. Over

[16] In an interview with K.J. Holmes, she offered the following example: She invited me to imagine a river. In my memory, the image included not only a visual component, but also sound, a quality of the light, a sense of location, and a physical sensation. This image arose is a construction. I can attach the categories to it, but it was an interactive process. Even within a short span of time, it had its own rhythm, timing, and sense of distance. The river was at enough of a distance that I could not touch *it,* yet I could connect to the quality of the environment where it was situated. Something of *it* permeated into my experience (Holmes, p.c. 2004).

time one develops an ability to see the patterns and trends of the individuals with whom one works.

The scores can elicit an interactive and engaged state in a plethora of ways. One such way is through the process of embodying somebody else's movement. For example, in a run of the tuning scores, one replays an original movement. Replaying is an operation that occurs in many choreographic processes, whenever one learns someone else's movement. In tuning scores, however, this aspect of dancing comes to the forefront, and the details of this process become the material itself. Because one has worked with the interaction of senses, the replay is not only based in a visual image. One tracks the whole experience of seeing. It becomes a dance of memory, tracking, and sensory feedback.

In working with the tuning scores, one translates the specificities that arise in particular events. This specificity of attention and action lets the richness of experience permeate into the act of composing. It requires being engaged and open to the possibility of emergent forms. It is an interaction with memory, receptivity, and embodied action. These practices and their ever-shifting environments evoke a kind of permeability. They instruct and invite fluidity between action, thinking, and the richness of a place. Once embodied, they are available to the participants in many applications.

The wide range of scores are a dimensional and permeable set of practices and interactions. Describing them offers the potential to demonstrate the breadth of Lisa's research, in collaboration with the other folks that work with the experiential scores. Yet, this act of describing also has a potential to limit through codifying a dynamic set of activities. By describing a few of the scores on the page, I am potentially instantiating the exact aspect of writing I am hoping to circumvent. I would like to show the movement and the possibilities that come from practicing this work. Perhaps the writing will invite the reader to experience the scores live.

APPENDIX No. 2
TUNING LOG, Seattle, via email

7/15/01

Friday night at our second tuning. Enter the park, already warm from a glow of togetherness. The visibility of the moon above a floating Rainier. In its hot pink gaze, john points out the cloud's road. An arrow of atemporal time traces.

We are moving and though begin was never called, it's clear our exploration is en-tuning. More enter.

Something passes through me, wave of alienation or despair. I walk towards the sign, the same brilliant orange of the borrowed sweater on my back. "hold" had been called then and another time later when I see the y emblazoned on the sidewalk, and the p in a circle somehow glowing in the grass. but for now its orange and the hold serves to hold me into the attention of the sign. I continue. I am melting into the sign. The cement softness. Then "replace," the call that lets me finally feel the silence of this inanimate friend. I embody its heaviness. Leaned at an angle. It has no eyes, no I's. Me, I don't know either these days. I can hide in its un-ness.

Angelina travels by with a trumpet. Towards the water. Something in the noise or the presence of her, her passage from my right to left. it gave me an orientation and i felt human again. With all the baggage of needs and desires that the signpost seems to never know. No thought or sense of trying/effort. My body involuntarily arches into an extension from my chest, my grasping habit. somehow that knowing of such an act of wanting-to-know grasping heads me straight to the earth in tears. Desperation of It All. Its brother, RETREAT-INTO-Self. I am scared to ask for what I really want. It changes and changes even before I named it.

We continue to attune ourselves, as the glow of the sun sets.

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